DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 423 638 EC 306 713

TITLE	Redesigning Special Education Services for All Students: The Indiana Agenda. Field Study Edition, Fall 1996.
INSTITUTION	Indiana Univ., Bloomington. Inst. for the Study of Developmental Disabilities.
SPONS AGENCY	Indiana State Dept. of Education, Indianapolis. Div. of Special Education.
PUB DATE	1996-00-00
NOTE	31p.
CONTRACT	14295-012-DY11
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute for Developmental Disabilities, Indiana University, 2853 East 10th Street, Bloomington, IN 47408-2601; Tel: 812-855-6508.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Change Strategies; Delivery Systems; *Disabilities; Education Work Relationship; Educational Change; *Educational Innovation; Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; *Inclusive Schools; *Integrated Services; *Regular and Special Education Relationship; School Community Programs; School Community Relationship; Student Centered Curriculum; Teacher Collaboration; Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS	*Indiana; Individualized Transition Plans

ABSTRACT

Developed by a think tank that included parents, board members, teachers, and administrators, this agenda is intended to generate discussion and promote consensus building on how best to meet the needs of Indiana students with and without disabilities. It provides an overview of the context for change in special education service delivery, examines common misperceptions that the general and special education systems seem to hold of each other, and builds a vision of what schools can become. The final section identifies five goals for transforming the vision into reality and redesigning the provision of special services for all students. The goals include: (1) educational services for all students will be managed at the building level; (2) student-centered assessments, curriculum, and instruction will be developed, implemented, evaluated, and continually improved for every student; (3) teachers and support staff will blend their talents, training, and experience to meet the individual needs of every student; (4) all students will have a transition plan linking curriculum and post-school outcomes; and (5) school and community services will be coordinated to meet the education, health, and welfare needs of students and families. Barriers and bridges related to each goal are outlined. (Contains 15 references.) (CR)

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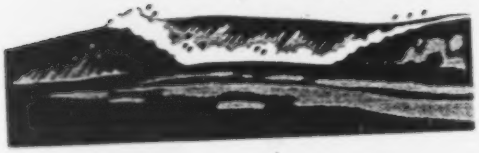
Waves of Change



Field Study Edition
Fall, 1996

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Redesigning Special Education Services for ALL Students:
The Indiana Agenda

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The writing of this manuscript was supported in part under contract with the Indiana Department of Education, Division of Special Education and the Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities. Publication and dissemination of these materials was performed under Grant Number 14295-012-DY11 from the Indiana Department of Education, Division of Special Education. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Indiana Department of Education, Division of Special Education, or Indiana University. No official endorsement of these materials should be inferred.

The Center for School and Community Integration (CSCI) is one of seven centers supported by the ISDD. The Institute is dedicated to the promotion and maintenance of a seamless system of inclusionary services for individuals with disabilities across the life span. Institute activities include interdisciplinary training, information dissemination and research, and community services.

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Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities, Henry J. Schroeder, Former Director
Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities, David Mank, Director

...a system of education ... equally open to all.
Indiana Constitution, 1846

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Foreword

In 1985, the Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities* at Indiana University, Bloomington, and the Indiana Department of Education, Division of Special Education collaborated on a document intended to mark both the beginning of a statewide initiative and to chart the course that initiative would take. The document, "A New Future for Children with Substantial Handicaps: The Second Wave of Least Restrictive Environment," received national attention as it set the stage for systemic and dramatic change in the way special education services were to be provided to young Hoosiers with severe disabilities. Since that time, many improvements have been made in services for all students with disabilities, as well as their classmates in general public education.

Building on those accomplishments, this document, "Redesigning Special Education Services for ALL Students: The Indiana Agenda," was developed. As the work of the development group evolved, it became clear that the question is not "how to restructure special education" but rather "how to restructure education to meet the individual needs of every student." Since the passage of federal legislation mandating "special" education 20 years ago, much has been learned about how to educate, integrate, and serve — in public schools — students with the most complex needs. What is left to do is to integrate expertise, experience, and resources in ways that maximize services to benefit all students, their families, and their communities.

This document is intended to generate discussion and promote consensus-building among practitioners, parents, communities, and decision-makers around how best to meet the needs of ALL Hoosier school students. Ten years ago, when the first document of this kind was disseminated, a full range of responses resulted. Some educators, parents, and policymakers lacked awareness of the issues addressed and were relatively unaffected; others were quite afraid and critical because they feared loss of services or control at a personal level. We anticipate the same reactions now. There are difficult questions raised in this document. Our willingness to address those questions objectively will determine the future quality of education for Indiana's students.

* Formerly Developmental Training Center

Introduction

An undertaking such as this is only possible by first building a foundation on the understanding, experience, and commitment of people who are directly involved with the students at the focus of concern. That foundation was constructed by:

- a ***Mother*** of two children in public school — one child has Down syndrome — who attends traditional classes in their neighborhood school in west central Indiana;
- a ***School Board Member*** and ***State Leader*** who supported pilot programs in northern Indiana that brought students with disabilities back to their home district and served them in general education settings;
- an ***Elementary Teacher*** who has students with identified disabilities in her first grade classroom in the south central area of the state;
- an ***Assistant Superintendent*** and former ***Middle School Principal*** in northwestern Indiana who was one of the first middle school principals in the state to develop services for students coming from a segregated special school;
- a ***Vocational Education Teacher*** from central Indiana who, for 15 years, has taught students with disabilities to be employable, contributing citizens in an urban community;
- an ***Elementary Principal*** who continues to build a climate of full acceptance of all students in his school in rural northern Indiana;
- a ***Director of Special Education*** in a large southern urban/rural planning district who orchestrated a 10-year strategic plan to serve all students in their neighborhood schools;
- a ***Superintendent*** from the southeast corner of Indiana who developed and is implementing a district-wide plan to serve all students in their home school with dually certified faculty;
- a ***Special Education Teacher*** who serves as a collaborating resource teacher and supports students with disabilities to remain in general education classes;
- an ***Elementary Assistant Principal*** and former ***Secondary Special Education Department Chair*** from one of the first three high schools in Indiana to pilot moving secondary-age students with severe disabilities from segregated schools to community high schools; and

- a nationally recognized ***Scholar, Author, Administrator,*** and longtime ***Observer*** of the Indiana Least Restrictive Environment Initiative from his window, first in California, now in Kansas.

This collection of individuals was selected to participate in a "Think Tank" in September and December, 1995. Each was invited on the basis of personal accomplishment and his/her understanding of, and experience with, both general and special education systems and practices. Every effort was made to assure that each region of Indiana was represented and that every participant could share opinions and information with the group openly and honestly.

The Think Tank was designed to build a practitioners' and parents' vision of what schools can be for ALL students with and without disabilities and to articulate the issues and strategies that need to be explored in order to realize that vision. They mastered the task. Out of the long hours of candid, trusting, and sometimes emotional discourse, this document emerged. Whatever shortcomings exist on these pages reflect only the limitations of capturing the participants' wisdom and energy in writing — for that, an advance apology.

This document is divided into four brief sections. Section 1 provides an overview of the context for change. In the past decade, special education services in Indiana, like other states, have undergone dramatic change. Many segregated facilities have closed. The doors of school buildings and classrooms have opened for groups of students that were never invited in before. The number of students sent out of state for services has decreased at an impressive rate. Pilot programs to bring students back to their neighborhood schools have sprung up across the state. Special education in Indiana in many ways has and continues to renew and restructure itself.

Curiously, even though these improvements seem directed at full participation in the context of general education, in Indiana and across the nation, special education restructuring efforts continue to develop in relative isolation from the broader discussion of school restructuring. A review of "school reform," "school restructuring," "school renewal," and "effective schools" literature (DuFour & Eaker, 1992; Finn, 1991; Lezotte, 1990; Schlechty, 1990; Sizer, 1984) reveals that special education, and the 12 to 15% of any school's population it represents, is virtually ignored. Section 1 examines some of the driving forces behind restructuring efforts in these dual systems of education and why persistent misperceptions often prevent these efforts from being collaborative.

Section 2 examines common misperceptions that the two systems of education seem to hold of each other. A discussion of the factors that contribute to those misperceptions of difference between "general" and "special" education systems is included.

Section 3 builds a vision of what schools can become. Envisioned are schools, nurtured by communities, that meet the needs of all students. Students and their families are the bull's eye of that vision.

Section 4 identifies five goals for transforming the vision into reality and redesigning the provision of special services for all students. Barriers and bridges related to each goal are outlined.

Redesigning schools to meet the complex needs of all students requires redesigning ourselves first. If we — the educators, parents, policymakers, teacher trainers, and taxpayers — really want the best schooling for our students, we must first be willing to see ourselves as an important part of the greater whole. Together, we can accomplish what mandates cannot. Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker share their insight:

> *. . . it is impossible to legislate excellence. Laws and regulations can neither substitute for nor create the common vision, shared values, and personal commitment that embody the soul of an excellent [school]. If individuals work in isolation without a sense of shared purpose or common goals, a [school] will not become more effective simply because it is told to do so. (1992, p.11)*

This document is dedicated to redesigning US — all of us — who will either develop a sense of shared purpose for our state's schools or remain isolated. Choose.

. . . . . Sandi Cole, Assistant Elementary Principal
. . . . . T.R. Ellis, Superintendent
. . . . . Dale Emmons, President of Indiana School Board Assn.
. . . . . Marti Farris, Parent
. . . . . Jim Hendress, Elementary Principal
. . . . . Barbara Holtzlander, Resource Teacher
. . . . . Terry Lavenda, Assistant Superintendent
. . . . . David Prevost, Vocational Education Teacher
. . . . . Ann Schnepf, Director of Special Education
. . . . . Jan Williamson, Elementary Education Teacher

. . . . . Facilitator: Wayne Sailor
University of Kansas

. . . . . Recording Writer: Nowana Nicholson

If you don't know what's behind you, you probably don't know what's ahead of you.
dad, 1968

As parents are so good at reminding us, it's important to know history while contemplating the future. A quick look in the rearview mirror at "special" and "general" education in Indiana is a good start to navigating the way to our destination.

Indiana passed mandatory special education legislation 6 years prior to the companion federal legislation, P.L. 94-142. At that time, schools were asked to serve students they had not served before and, in some cases, did not even know existed. New directors of special education often physically searched for students, found them, and then desperately searched for ways to meet their needs. The year, 1969, marked the beginning of special education in Indiana; it also marked the beginning of a parallel system of education whose function was perceived to be quite different from the traditional "regular" education system.

As teachers, related services professionals, and scholars struggled to find ways of schooling the new group of students, the medical model of "diagnose and treat" became the prevailing orientation. Several factors contributed to this focus. The state's reimbursement formula to schools, in order to comply with federal statutes, was based on disability categories, thus requiring schools to identify students by disability in order to secure additional funds to serve them. Consequently teacher training programs and certification standards were established on a categorical basis such as "physically handicapped," "emotionally handicapped," "severe disabilities," "learning disabilities," etc.

The "diagnose and treat" orientation further inadvertently stripped students of their individual identities. Diagnoses became labels. Students became "the retarded," "the LDs," "the EHs," and the like.

The deficit-centered approach had tremendous impact on what students were taught (curriculum), how they were taught (instruction), and where they were taught (placement). In general, the guiding principles were a) the more severe the disability, the more elementary the curriculum, b) the more severe the disability, the slower the pace of instruction, and c) the more severe the disability, the more isolated the placement. So, a high school age student with severe disabilities could be found still trying to learn the alphabet in a separate school that served only students with disabilities. Opposite their peers in "regular" education, individual strengths played little if any role in the education of students with disabilities.

While there certainly is a place for the "diagnose and treat" model in the understanding and prevention of disability, educators soon found the medical orientation to be woefully lacking as a prescription for effective curriculum and instructional strategies. In other words, having a diagnosis of "autism" neither uniquely prescribes what and how a teacher should teach nor does it reliably predict what a student can learn and do.

New administrators struggled with other issues. Looking to the industrial model of "sort and select" for guidance, they began to address the questions of how Indiana could best serve students with needs perceived to be very different from one another and do it in a cost effective fashion.

A variety of solutions emerged. *Special* classrooms were established and taught by teachers with *special licenses*. Students with the same label were placed in these smaller classes based on the assumption that these students would learn better together. *Special* wings were added to existing buildings. Twenty-seven *special* schools were constructed.

Administrative structures developed to manage the growing special education system and included "joint service agreements," "cooperatives," and "interlocals." These structures were managed by special education administrators who typically functioned separately from, and parallel to, the administration of school districts.

Although these solutions were developed with the very best of intentions, they built a mindset that special education was a PLACE, away from the traditional classroom, rather than a SUPPORT to an individual student. And, with every referral from a typical classroom to special education, another teacher and principal were seemingly relieved of the responsibility of educating another child — he now "belonged to the co-op."

By 1985, the solutions of the past began to look more like the problems of the present. In Indiana, as in other states, the number of students identified as eligible for special services was growing at a steady rate in virtually every disability category — and at a rate much higher than the overall school population growth. Were we getting better at identifying students in need of special services? Were we over-identifying students? Were socio-economic and environmental factors contributing to more children becoming disabled? Some questions remain unanswered. But, as the Colorado State Director of Special Education, Bryan McNulty, put it, ". . . at this rate, pretty soon there will be more of 'us' than 'them'."

Also in 1985, graduate follow-up studies conducted in Indianapolis (which were consistent with national data) reported that students with more involved disabilities who exited special education programs were overwhelmingly unemployed, underemployed, living at home, and dependent on family for basic needs (Adams, 1983). It was evident that special education was not serving to prepare its students for adult life.

Further, parents whose children were served in large rural areas began to question the excessive transportation time involved in bussing their children to magnet classrooms. Special education teachers questioned whether traditional developmentally-based curriculum was really teaching students to function and lead a more independent life in the community after graduation. "Regular" education teachers complained that resource services for students with mild disabilities turned their classrooms into "revolving doors." Advocates maintained that separate schooling for students with disabilities was inherently unequal and the courts agreed.

On the tenth anniversary of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (P.L. 94-142), Madeleine Will, the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, U.S. Department of Education (1985), suggested that we "visualize the future and begin to plan for it." In response, the Indiana Department of Education, Division of Special Education launched the "Indiana Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Initiative." The initiative, in collaboration with the Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities* provided statewide training and intensive on-site technical assistance to 64 model school districts across the state over a seven year period.

As a result of this and other efforts, Indiana has many accomplishments to celebrate. Most of the state's segregated schools have restructured or now have integrated educational options available. Many students with disabilities now have the same opportunity as their peers to attend the school in their neighborhood, be members of a typical grade-level class, and have the supports they need come to them rather than being pulled out of class for special services. Students with more severe disabilities participate in functional, community-based, and/or work-based experience programs which result in increases in post-school employment. Peer tutor programs now exist across the state that support the physical, social, and academic integration of students with disabilities in general education settings.

Perhaps because of these accomplishments and those like them in other states, special education now seems to be in a crisis of change. In 1995, the debate over national legislation to assure the education of all children, now called the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), began anew. The impact on Indiana concerning its anticipated reauthorization and related budget is in question. The more personal debates, however, are not on the floor of any legislative chamber but rather in school board meetings, teachers' lounges, and professional journals read by both general and special educators. These debates are not about mandates; they are about practices.

Some authors and practitioners argue that advocates for students with severe disabilities over-generalize when they suggest that a traditional class is a good place for all students to learn. Yet many students are demonstrating the benefits of decentralized rather than concentrated "special" instruction. Teachers are discovering that many students can be successful in traditional classrooms where curriculum and instruction are adapted to meet their individual learning styles and capabilities. General education teachers, school psychologists, principals, and researchers ponder whether there is a real or imaginary line between some students with "identified" learning disabilities, attention disorders, communication disorders, or hyperactivity, and any other student in a typical class on a given day (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Richardson, 1994; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1988). Administrators fear that categorical eligibility determination, litigation, and the high cost of assistive technology will bankrupt the system.

* Formerly the Developmental Training Center

While the special education system engages in these debates, the general education system wrestles with other issues stemming from another historical context.

Accountability of public schools in general captured the country's attention when the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued its 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*. The harsh and threatening language of the report was received by some as an undeserved slap in the face; to others, it became the rationale for "school restructuring." In their text, *Creating the New American School: A Principal's Guide to School Improvement* (1992), DuFour and Eaker describe the report and its impact as a:

> ***. . . tremendously effective . . . catalyst for a flurry of school improvement initiatives throughout the United States***

They go on to report that within two years over 300 national and state school improvement task forces were appointed, 41 states increased academic requirements for graduation, teacher certification and tenure requirements were strengthened, and standardized curriculum and testing were initiated in several states. The pressure to improve academic achievement was on!

Indiana responded in 1987, under the leadership of Dr. H. Dean Evans, Superintendent of Public Instruction. At the state level, the pursuit of academic excellence led to an increased number of school days per year, increased instructional time, decreased teacher/student ratios in elementary grades, and extensive standardized testing. At the local level, schools were encouraged, through pilot grants and waivers, to reform or restructure. Despite all this activity, there never emerged a commonly held definition of restructuring in Indiana or the nation.

Today, schools are doing things never done before. While they remain under tremendous scrutiny regarding academic achievement, schools have also recognized the necessity for meeting children's basic needs that used to be the purview of traditional families and communities. Many schools now provide before- and after-school child care, recreational programs, two meals a day, counseling, health care, child care for students with children, and more.

Clearly schools cannot assume full societal responsibility for our nation's children without collapsing under the weight. But neither can teachers teach a child who is hungry, in physical or emotional pain, or under the influence of drugs or alcohol. While schools cannot do it all, they are best situated to play a significant role in linking families and children with other community service providers and to foster collaborative planning for child/family assistance programs at the community level. The emerging trend is toward family/school/community partnerships which function to integrate and coordinate a host of needed services.

Given the diverse historical context and demands placed on "general education" and "special education," is it surprising there is a lack of communication, understanding, and collaboration between the two systems? Stephen Covey in *The*

Seven Habits of Highly Effective People illustrates how quickly individuals form perceptions about something based on their own history and how difficult it is to change those perceptions or see the perception of another who has experienced an entirely different history (1989, p. 31). Perhaps his point is relevant to the relationship between the two systems of education. The more the two systems developed in isolation from one another, the greater perceptions grew that their mission was different, their students were different, their methods were different, and the expertise required of teachers was different. The next section examines those perceptions.

2 PERCEPTIONS OF DIFFERENCE: "General" vs. "Special" Education

"WHY do I have to go to school?"

Every child in America, one morning

It's a good question. Why do schools exist? And, does the answer to that question depend on whether we are referring to "general" or "special" education? If it does, what makes some students "special"? What "special" services do those students need? What "special" training do teachers require in order to meet their needs? What do we truly believe regarding these issues?

The examination of four common perceptions is useful in clarifying the beliefs that underlie the current system of educational services.

PERCEPTION: The fundamental purpose of special education is different from the rest of education.

Schools in Indiana are asked to come to consensus on the purpose of schooling when they go through "Performance-Based Accreditation" evaluation or get a new superintendent or perhaps restructure around some new concept. To build consensus, schools typically articulate their reason for existence in a "mission statement" that might read:

> The mission of this school is to teach democracy, productivity, self-reliance, community citizenship, and the acceptance of others as interdependent human beings by fostering self-esteem and respect.

Is this mission of schooling any different for that 15% of students served in special education or any other federally supported categorical assistance program?

PERCEPTION: Students in special education are very different from those in the rest of education.

Traditional service models are predicated on the assumption that students in special education are quantifiably different from their "typical" classmates. Although the debate lingers on, adversaries of the question miss the point that it is not the differences in children with which we ought to be concerned but rather how their diverse needs can best be met. Once the mindset is changed, precious resources consumed by endless testing to find out what's "wrong" can be reallocated to activities more likely to produce instructional value.

PERCEPTION: The services needed by students in special education are substantially different from the rest of education.

All students, with and without disabilities, have quite different needs. However, the sorting method of figuring out who stays in general education and who is eligible for

special education presumes that needs cluster according to type or degree of disability, and further, that one placement or the other will inherently result in meeting those needs.

Many instances of past practice demonstrate the fallacies of those assumptions. For example, traditionally students with communication and behavior challenges were all assigned to the same class which virtually eliminated peer modeling of functional communication and appropriate behavior. Rather than providing an effective learning environment, the placement actually inhibited learning and damaged social relationships and self-esteem (Villa, Thousand, Stainback, & Stainback, 1992).

The focus on sorting out who is eligible for special services is a distraction from the important question, what does an individual child really need in order to increase his/her chances of living a productive and independent life as an adult? National statistics report that as many as 30% of students are considered "at risk" for school failure. According to the Indiana Department of Education, over 17% — nearly one out of five students — will not graduate from high school. Contributing factors to these frightening statistics include poverty, homelessness, child abuse, and drugs and alcohol abuse (Sailor, Anderson, Halvorsen, Doering, Filler, & Goetz, 1989). The question is not whether "special education or general education" services; the question is, what do students need — one student at a time.

PERCEPTION: Teachers need different training to be effective with special education students.

While public schools deal with the issues of restructuring, higher education remains relatively unaffected. Teacher training programs are typically not in step with innovations commonly practiced in schools and are even more entrenched in specialization and a categorical system of education.

Young teachers typically choose between the two types of education early in their university programs. Those who choose "special" education further specialize among the various categories such as "learning disabilities" or "severe disabilities." Those who choose "general" education are barely exposed to information about any disability — a puzzling practice given the high percentage of future students who will be at risk for school failure.

This separation presumes there are vast differences in the skills needed to be one kind of teacher or the other when the realities of a classroom suggest otherwise. For example, the number one reported concern of educators today is *discipline*; yet, only "special" educators typically receive preservice training in behavior management (Sprick, 1995).

Furthermore, segregated, categorical teacher training programs, do not reflect the practices of many schools that have developed a collaborative culture where general

and special education expertise is blended. This lag between training and current practice is discussed by Bushweller (1995) in the *American School Board Journal*:

> *Education schools are particularly distanced from the realities of public school teaching. What we need is for future teachers to have more real experience in real schools.* (p. 22-27)

Teachers who do have real experience know that what is important is collaboration not specialization. To be effective with any student, a teacher must have the skills to conduct meaningful assessments, adapt curriculum and instruction, and accommodate individual students' needs.

Thoughtful examination of these perceptions related to the function of schooling, differences in students, differences in service needs, and differences in teaching skills points to the conclusions that:

* the fundamental purpose of education is the same for all students,
* all students have individual needs,
* labels and segregated placements are poor determinants of appropriate service delivery, and
* the basic skill requirements for effective teaching are the same regardless of the student.

Why then do we have two separate systems of education — "general" education and "special" education? Why do we need two parallel administrative structures to provide school services?

"What is school like?"
A 4-year-old, 1995

As DuFour and Eaker (1992) reminded, the soul of an excellent school is embodied in a common vision, shared values, and personal commitment. How does a common vision come about? It comes about from an examination of where we are and where we want to be. It comes about through celebration of past accomplishments and reconciliation with current practices that fail to achieve desired outcomes. It comes about through honest discussion that challenges perceptions, assumptions, traditions, and vested interests. It comes about because someone, or something, provides the opportunity. The purpose of this document is to provide that opportunity.

The vision, described in the following pages, is the work of a group of parents, teachers, administrators, and policy makers who together have experience in general and special education in elementary, middle, and high schools. They came from homes and schools in every region of the state, from large and small communities. They came together to celebrate accomplishments, reconcile failures, dream, challenge, take a risk, and open the dialogue. Their vision is shared here with the understanding that if we are to develop a sense of common purpose for our schools, the visioning process must be repeated locally in communities across the state. Their vision should not be interpreted as prescriptive, but it is intended to generate thoughts and discussion.

"What is school like?" — A Vision

School is a place totally focused on each individual student in the community — the students most physically and cognitively challenged, the students most physically and cognitively gifted, and every student who is somewhere in between. There is no "general" and "special" education; there are no labels.

Every student has a plan with goals, and an individualized curriculum, that he and his team of teachers along with his parents put together just for him. The curriculum and its applications to future use are inextricably linked.

Students are heterogeneously grouped to support their success. Sometimes students are working along with older classmates, sometimes with younger classmates, and sometimes with peer tutors. Students are not compared to standardized norms. Instead, progress toward individual goals is carefully watched and accomplishments are celebrated.

Learning environments are flexible. Sometimes a student works with a small group of classmates on a project particularly well suited to his goals, abilities, and curiosity; other times he works alone. All students have access to technology suited to their individual needs. If a student requires therapies, they come to him and are naturally integrated into functional activities, rather than sending him someplace for isolated clinical practice. Classroom walls and resources are portable to accommodate options for instructional settings.

A student and her family who have multiple needs, some of which can be met in school, others by community agencies, should receive such support locally. A planning team comprised of members from school and other relevant agencies develops an integrated service plan to insure that supports are coordinated and provided.

Around age 14, when students complete aptitude assessments, every student has identified goals and a plan to make the transition from high school to employment, college, military service, independent living, whatever his/her future holds. The plan identifies all the steps involved in making the transition and all the people, in addition to the student, who will play a role in assuring that those steps are completed. The plan will be regularly reviewed to be sure it remains on target.

The teachers view themselves as vital members of students' teams because the colleges and universities that trained them taught them how to collaborate, integrate therapies, and design and adapt curriculum/instruction. Each brings to the team his individual talents and expertise. They teach together sometimes in the same classroom, sometimes moving from room to room. They coach each other, take chances, and really stretch with the confidence that they are "required to make a certain number of mistakes."

The principal recognizes that one of his most valuable resources is his faculty and staff. He chooses each person carefully and then supports, protects, and defends each one when necessary. He builds a climate of success embodied in high expectations for every student regardless of ability.

The superintendent and her board clear the way for the school to meet its mission. Unnecessary time-consuming paper work is eliminated. She facilitates the blending of funding streams in ways that best meet the needs of students and teachers. Unnecessary rules, regulations, and policies are erased to ensure that every decision made is evaluated on the basis of its potential benefit to students.

The community shows as much enthusiasm for students who achieve their individualized goals as it does for the school's basketball team! The community understands that the school is its future. That's why the school building is open from 6:00 a.m. into the evening, year round. It opens early because the long halls and stairs make safe, warm exercise courses for "office athletes" and retired neighbors who want to stay physically fit. The library, conference room, and swimming pool are open for public use during non-class time (so taxpayers don't mind building and maintaining them). The child care center operated by the Home Economics, Child Development,

and Business classes is open to children of the faculty, students' children, and neighborhood preschoolers. Classrooms are used in the evenings for adult literacy classes and college courses taught through agreements with state universities. The school has become the community learning center where many needs are met — not all by principals, teachers, and traditional school staff, but also by community members.

The citizens of the community have a shared vision because when they went to school, they learned about democracy. They learned how to be productive, self-reliant citizens, and out of their own self-esteem and respect for others, they accept all others as interdependent human beings.

That's what school could be like. . .

Developing a shared vision is the first step to systems change. The second step is identifying specific goals that will lead to the transformation from vision to reality. The third step is clarifying the barriers that stand in the way of goal achievement; and finally, the fourth step is carefully constructing the bridges that make goal achievement possible.

To transform this vision to reality, at least five goals must be achieved:

GOAL 1: Educational services for all students will be managed at the building level.

GOAL 2: Student-centered assessments, curriculum, and instruction will be developed, implemented, evaluated, and continually improved for every student.

GOAL 3: Teachers and support staff will blend their talents, training, and experience to meet the individual needs of every student.

GOAL 4: All students will have a transition plan linking curriculum and post-school outcomes.

GOAL 5: School and community services will be coordinated to meet the educational, health, and welfare needs of students and families.

Change agents teach us that if a goal is to be accomplished those involved must a) want the goal to be achieved, b) have the skills to achieve the goal, and c) have the tools or capacity to achieve the goal. All three must be present. Below, each goal is analyzed according to some of the major attitude, skill, or capacity "barriers" that currently exist. Each "barrier" is coupled with strategies for building "bridges" to goal achievement.

GOAL 1: Educational services for all students will be managed at the building level.

Attitude Barrier: ***"Students in special education are the responsibility of the cooperative."***

Traditionally, general education services have been managed at the building level. Principals are the instructional leaders, the climate builders, the personnel developers, the authority figures to students, and the primary link between school and home. Principals know their local area, their students, their students' families, and the family situations that impact student performance in school.

For 20 years, special education services have been managed by administrators who function at a district or multiple district level. Those administrators are the advocates, service developers, staff developers, and primary link between

school and home. This practice has had the effect of placing responsibility for special education students not on the principal and inside his building, but rather on an administrator who may be in a neighboring county far from the school and the home.

The practice of homogeneously grouping low incidence disabilities further contributes to lack of building level ownership of students and services. At its worst, the practice results in students with the most severe disabilities leaving their neighborhood for school services, being transported the farthest for the shortest instructional days, to a school chosen for availability of space. These students may move from school to school, year to year. Such practices exacerbate building level involvement with families, students, and even their teachers. Such practices understandably imply to principals that "someone else administers services to special education students."

***Attitude Bridge:* "Give principals back their kids."**

Principals understand and take responsibility for "their kids." The growing practice of keeping students in the school they would attend if not disabled results in students with disabilities becoming "their kids." The practice naturally distributes students, with a full range of disabilities and levels of needs, across buildings and grade levels, rather than concentrating students with intense needs in one location. Regular school placements facilitate home/school partnerships, natural supports, and service improvement.

***Skill Barrier:* "General education teachers are not trained to teach students with all disabilities."**

It may be true that preservice training does not adequately address the needs of all exceptional students, but it is also true that even the best training programs in "general" or "special" education could not prepare teachers for every student who will come into their classrooms. As discussed in Section 2, the perception that only specially trained professionals can teach students with identified disabilities is unrealistic and unfounded.

***Skill Bridge:* "Together we're better."**

Many of the skills that teachers are developing, such as cooperative learning groups, whole language instruction, co-teaching, and adaptation of curriculum and instruction, support effective teaching of diverse students. Across the state, excellent examples of blended service provision exist. Combined (general and special education faculty) staff development opportunities make collaboration possible and strengthen everyone's skills.

Capacity Barrier: ***"Separate funding sources prevent unified service management."***

The funding of unified school services will be one of the most involved, debated, and emotionally charged issues to be resolved. There are several reasons.

Advocacy groups have worked long and hard in their struggle for categorical funding of special education on the assumption that money follows services. A call for change brings fear that unified services necessarily results in service reduction even though model school programs across the state demonstrate otherwise.

School funding is inherently complicated and currently restrictive to local management of unified services. For example, significant savings in transportation costs might be expected if all students attended their school of record rather than a magnet program out of their home district. But, district transportation savings cannot currently be transferred to cover instructional costs at the building level.

Capacity Bridge: ***"Evaluate the data."***

New funding mechanisms are currently under consideration that are based on factors other than categorical reimbursement. Their impact on service delivery is not yet completely understood. What is understood is that labels and categories do not determine intensity or quality of services on an individual level. For example, a student with severe disabilities does not necessarily get, or even need, a full-time assistant. Consequently, there is no reason to presume that services will necessarily decline if some other basis for funding services is used.

There is reason for optimism. Early cost analyses conducted in Indiana schools that are providing building-based services indicate no significant increases in costs (Roahrig & Schnepf, 1995). Further studies are needed at the district level. Given the potential benefit of unified building-based services, a model development project seems warranted. If how funding sources could be blended without reduction of services could be documented, such a pilot project could provide guidance in the on-going debate encompassing school funding and reallocation of resources.

GOAL 2: Student-centered assessment, curriculum, and instruction will be developed, implemented, evaluated, and continually improved for every student.

Attitude Barrier: ***"This can't be done."***

Teachers and administrators who have experienced difficult Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings are understandably uncomfortable with the prospect of being asked to develop an individual plan for every student in the building.

Unfortunately, the special education system has not always provided the best models or experiences to that end. The image of several professionals and a parent who may not know each other, struggling to go through mounds of forms, reports, and notes to come up with a yearly curriculum is a fearful one and probably the only one that can be imagined.

Attitude Bridge: ***"There is a better way."***

The procedure illustrated above has several disadvantages. It can be time consuming; it can be hard to schedule all the members of the committee for the same time; it can be interpersonally uncomfortable; it can be ineffective because of unclear roles, procedures, or desired outcomes. There are better ways.

Given the opportunity, building teams have devised mechanisms for functional assessment and individualizing curriculum and instruction. A place to begin is to examine how current resources are consumed. Section 2 suggested that considerable resources are used to test and retest students for a variety of reasons that ultimately yield little instructional value. The student files that move from grade to grade — what's in them — does the information really help a teacher know what or how to teach a student? The first question for a building team is, how can human resources and time resources be reallocated to support learning?

Secondly, parent involvement is an important ingredient in an appropriate and effective student plan. Offering parents options for participation that are non-threatening, sensitive to family circumstances or work schedules, or otherwise "consumer friendly" can result in better outcomes.

Current technology offers alternatives to "face to face" meetings. Conference calls can be completed in less time than it might take to travel to a meeting location. Electronic mail makes it possible to communicate anytime day or night at personal convenience. These, in addition to "low tech" options like sending notes home in backpacks, can support individualizing learning experiences for students.

The young person wearing that backpack is a valuable resource as well. Successful models of "student-directed learning" exist where students take an active role in selection and monitoring mastery of their own school work.

Skill Barrier: ***"I don't know how to individualize classroom activities for every student."***

Innovative methods of assessment and strategies for adapting curriculum and instruction may be new to some teachers because they have traditionally not been included in teacher preparation training.

Skill Bridge: ***"Start with what you already know."***

A full range of opportunities for personnel development are available. Professional association conferences, college courses, regional workshops, self-instructional training packages, peer tutoring, and an array of library resources are available to instructional staff who want to retool skills in these areas.

What many teachers have discovered though, is that they already know a lot about adapting curriculum and instruction for individual students — they have been doing it for years without realizing it. They have been assigning different problems to some students who need more challenge, or reducing the number of spelling words for a child, or having one student write a paper while another gives an oral report. As a teaching strategy, "adaptation" may be new, but it's as old as "good teaching."

Capacity Barrier: ***"Requirements for standardized testing prevent alternative evaluation of student performance."***

Requirements for standardized evaluation and grades do pose challenges. The need to "sort and select" students for college entrance, job training programs, scholarships, and the rest places undue importance on scores and grades and contributes to notions that they are far more accurate indicators of individual performance and potential than they really are.

Capacity Bridge: ***"Two types of assessment are better than one."***

Requirements for standardized testing need not prevent alternative assessments. Conducting both types of assessments would provide more information than is currently available and information that future employers want.

Business and industry want to know if graduates know how to solve problems; if they can assimilate information and make decisions; if they can effectively work in teams; if they can be innovative and creative. Grades and scores fail to answer those questions but authentic assessments can. Student evaluation policies that support only standardized measurement shortchange students and contribute to "what is valued is what is taught."

GOAL 3: Teachers and support staff will blend their talents, training, and experience to meet the needs of every student.

Attitude Barrier: ***"I don't want to give up my classroom."***

Experienced teachers and their new colleagues fresh out of training programs are sometimes surprised and upset at the suggestion that they may "lose their classrooms." The only mental picture they ever had of themselves was standing alone in "their" class. The thought of sharing their space and students with another adult is threatening and uncomfortable.

Attitude Bridge: ***"Special education is a set of services; not a place."***

Blended teaching focuses attention on what is happening, not where it is happening. Teachers working alongside other teachers and therapists in classrooms improves the quality of services for every student. Importing resources and therapies into the natural flow of class activities insures relevancy and carryover, and demonstrates a new skill to a colleague that may help another student.

Skill Barrier: ***"I don't know how to team."***

Collaboration can be awkward and threatening for many teachers. Once a collaborative attitude develops, learning how to collaborate is nothing more than learning a set of effective behaviors.

Skill Bridge: ***"Teaming takes time and practice."***

Across the state, teachers are developing and demonstrating various models of effective collaboration such as co-teaching, team teaching, collaborative consultation, and the like. Observation and debriefing with these experienced veterans is an excellent means of developing awareness, confidence, and excitement. Next steps are to develop relationships among partners; plan classroom activities; negotiate who does what, how grades will be determined, and how discipline will be managed; then practice, practice, practice — knowing that "a certain number of mistakes are required."

Capacity Barrier: ***"Certification requirements determine who can do what."***

Current certification requirements are out of step with promising practices implemented in local schools.

Capacity Bridge: ***"Waivers and 'teachers of record' support innovative instructional personnel plans."***

Certification requirements are under review. In anticipation of change, some university training programs are exploring "generalist" licensing patterns. In the interim, waivers permit innovative instructional personnel plans. In some cases waivers may even include professionals who are not certified teachers, such as a veterinarian who teaches animal science, or a local businessman who teaches a unit on accounting.

Specific to the issue of who can teach special education students, Indiana rules and regulations specify that an appropriately certified "teacher of record" must design and monitor a student's instruction, but that teacher does not have to provide all direct instruction or even be in the classroom during instruction.

GOAL 4: All students will have a transition plan linking curriculum and post-school outcomes.

Attitude Barrier: ***"More paperwork!"***

A transition plan for every secondary student is a "hot button" issue for teachers. Like individual education plans, it brings nightmares of mountains of filefolders and questions of "when am I supposed to teach?"

Attitude Bridge: ***"The purpose of schooling is to prepare students for life after graduation."***

Experience taught secondary special educators a lesson worth sharing. Desired post-school outcomes either guide and direct curriculum and instructional options for students or school is ineffective and students fail. They fail to get and keep jobs; they fail to live independently; they fail to be contributing members of the communities in which they live as adults.

Secondary programs cannot afford to function at the level of teaching discrete subject areas without bridging course content to post-graduation goals. Neither can vocational training programs continue to function in relative isolation. Seventy-five percent of the students who go to college do not graduate, which suggests that the division and subsequent choice between college preparation and vocational preparation fails to serve students' long-term needs.

Effective planning and preparation for the future requires more than a few trips to the counselors office. It requires serious work on the part of students, parents, school personnel, adult service agencies, and potential employers. New models are emerging to structure the transition for all secondary students.

Skill Barrier: ***"I don't know how to do transition planning for students in professional preparation, vocational education, and special education."***

Different programs affecting different groups of students contribute to the confusion related to a) specifically what is to be done, b) how it is to be done, and c) when transition/career planning is to begin. In Indiana, students receiving special education services are required to have an "Individual Transition Plan," while students in general education are required to have "Individual Career Plans." Some students have both because of unclear directives.

Skill Bridge: ***"Build skills through collaboration."***

Transition planning/career planning is a deceptively simple idea made unnecessarily complicated by lack of coordination and communication. In general, the steps of the process are to a) identify post-graduation student goals, b) identify annual objectives that lead to goals, c) identify individuals responsible for activities related to each objective, and d) identify a method of tracking task completion.

As a result of systemic separation between special education, vocational education, and the rest of education, each camp is in the process of inventing mechanisms to implement a similar process. It would appear more efficient to bring together a building level team comprising school counselors, vocational coordinators, transition coordinators, relevant community service agency representatives, local employers, and representatives of county STEP AHEAD Councils to share information and exchange ideas. Coordination of effort at the development stage holds great potential for all stakeholders.

Capacity Barrier: ***"Limited resources, limit possibilities."***

When faced with the changing demands for training manpower for work in business, industry, the social sciences, and technology, schools understandably look to limited resources and see limited possibilities.

Capacity Bridge: ***"Community, business, school partnerships build futures."***

If students are to make good choices about their future, they need real work experiences upon which to base those choices. Schools need not replicate or simulate employment experiences that naturally exist in the community. Community, business, school partnerships provide endless opportunities for individualized futures planning and improved post-school success.

GOAL 5: School and community services will be coordinated to meet the educational, health, and welfare needs of students and families.

Attitude Barrier: ***"Schools can't do it all."***

Schools can't educate, as well as feed, clothe, nurture, and provide extended supervision for every student who needs it; but, neither can they educate a child if no one else does.

Attitude Bridge: ***"Schools are best situated to support coordinated services."***

Teachers spend more time with students than many of their parents. Single parent households, poverty, substance abuse, and many other social factors contribute to poor life quality for millions of school children. School is the only meaningful contact many students have with the community outside of their home environment and that contact is their only chance to access the community services they need.

Skill Barrier: ***"How can this be done?"***

Service coordination is a skill many communities have yet to develop. Competition for limited resources, variability in eligibility requirements, lack of awareness, and poor communication exacerbate the provision of integrated services.

Skill Bridge: ***"Community service coordination models exist."***

Despite considerable obstacles, models of coordinated community service do exist. Examples such as community agencies collaborating with schools to combine child care with parenting classes and GED programs are becoming more common. These school/community links demonstrate that services can be integrated and schools naturally play a supportive role in improved children's services.

Capacity Barrier: ***"Limited human resources prevent coordination."***

Frequently the reaction to efforts to coordinate service provision is that it will demand additional manpower. Like the sign on the wall that reads, "There's never time to do it right but there is always time to do it over, and over, and over," perhaps resources would be better spent on service improvement than on replication.

Capacity Bridge: ***"Community service coordination mechanisms exist."***

Indiana has in place an innovative mechanism for community service coordination. Each of the 92 counties in Indiana has an appointed STEP AHEAD Council whose function is to integrate and coordinate community services. Councils currently function within a broad range of effectiveness; nevertheless, they do represent a significant accomplishment in the improvement of human services in Indiana.

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The purpose of this document is to contribute to the development of a common vision of the future of special education services. That goal can be achieved through celebration of past accomplishments, reconciliation of failed practices, and honest discussion that challenges perceptions, assumptions, traditions, and vested interests. Whatever personal, civic, or professional role YOU play in the education of Hoosier school children, ". . . let us put our minds together and see what life we can make for our children . . ." (Sitting Bull, 1877).

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed, it's the only thing that ever does."

Margaret Mead

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